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Chaining and Spotlighting:

Two Types of Paragraph Boundaries in Sunwar

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The purpose of this paper is to present some of our early findings on paragraph boundaries in Sunwar[2] in the hope of stimulating parallel research in related languages. The original stimulus for this work came from Grimes and Glock (1970).

Two major types of fables and stories can be distinguished in Sunwar: event-focused fables and stories and participant-focused fables and stories.[3] In event-focused discourse, plot structure is prominent. Temporal sequence of events is important. The thread which holds the discourse together is the sequence of events upon which the story depends for its coherence. In participant-focused discourse, the cast is prominent. The events are important as they depict and describe the cast. The thread which holds the discourse together is the cast itself. These are character studies and the events are held together in coherent discourse by virtue of the fact that they share participants. The events themselves may never quite add up to a coherent plot.

I. EVENT CHAINING AS PARAGRAPH BOUNDARY

We have found two types of event chaining which function as paragraph boundaries: chaining with identical verb phrases and chaining with temporal reference. Chaining with identical verb phrases apparently has no temporal or sequential function but functions simply to mark the end of one paragraph and the beginning of another. Chaining with temporal reference does have a temporal function. It relates the two paragraphs in time, either as being in non-overlapping sequence or as overlapping in time. They may mark either an "after" relation or a "while" relation.

Event chaining in its function of paragraph bounding involves the repetition of certain elements. Repetition of elements may also occur paragraph medial, but the two are quite distinct. Firstly, they differ in intonation pattern. In paragraph-bounding (chaining) repetition, a sentence-final intonation must precede the second link; in paragraph-medial repetition, a sentence-non-final intonation precedes every repetition.

Secondly, the repetitions differ in degree of iteration. Chaining generally involves only two occurrences of a given string (Example 2), whereas paragraph-medial repetition may involve as many as five occurrences (Example 1). The paragraph-medial repetition of the verb stem plus person marker signals emphasis. The number of repetitions marks the degree of intensity.

1) minu-da paan dzana dum-sha / la-ma / la-ma / la-ma /
and-el five people become-sm go-3pl go-3pl go-3pl

la-ma / la-ma / meko a dzaak-dit-tike khiin-mi
go-3pl go-3pl that his arrive-Lr-N house-L

trekkay dzaak-dim-ma 'baakt ///[4]
quickly arrive-Lr-3pl pp

And after they were five men, they went and went and arrived quickly at his house.

2) tin dzana-mi 'suld-me / 'suld-me / 'kay 'thin-ne
three people-ag feel-3pl feel-3pl no one find-auxR

ma-tsap-me 'baakt. ///
neg-can-3pl pp

Three men were groping around, yet no one could find it.

A. Chaining with Identical Verb Phrases

In this form of paragraph boundary, the independent clause which ends a paragraph is uttered with a falling, sentence-final intonation followed by a pause. The following paragraph begins with a repetition of this clause, uttered with a level, sentence-non-final intonation.

3) bii 'gyap-nu /// bii 'gyap-nu / ...
cow buy-1s,np cow buy-1s,np

I will buy a cow. I will buy a cow, ...

4) 'kay gaak-tsa ma-gew-a 'baakt /// 'kay gaak-tsa
no one walk-inf neg-give-3s pp no one walk-inf

ma-gew-a 'baakta / ...
neg-give-3s pp

Nobody was allowed to pass. Nobody being allowed to pass, ...

Certain variations are allowed in this type of chaining. A linking -a, apparently meaningless, may be suffixed to the last verb of the paragraph-initial chaining clause, as in Example 4, 'baakta.' This -a never occurs in the paragraph-final clause and is a segmental concomitant of linking intonation.

The order of elements may be changed in chaining of this sort. Emphatic order often occurs in paragraph-final position, rarely in paragraph-initial position. Emphatic order involves placing the emphasized word or phrase in sentence-final position, following the end of the sentence-final intonation. The emphasized element receives its own, essentially level intonation. The emphasized word or phrase may be repeated, or it may be omitted in the paragraph-initial chaining clause.

5) minu meko khuy oo-ma 'baakt aga ///
and these thieves enter-3pl pp inside

khuy aga oo-ma 'baakta / ...
thieves inside enter-3pl pp

And these thieves entered into the house. Having entered into the house, thieves ...

6) 'nell din kohdra taar laa gaak 'baak-maakt meko mur ///
all day horse back only go be-3s,po that man

minu kohdra taar laa gaak 'baak-m-akta / ...
and horse back only go be-3s,pp

All day that man was riding the horse. He was riding the horse, ...

Note that chaining with identical verb phrases allows omissions:

7) meko busu oo-maakt /// oo-maakta / ...
that snake enter-3s,pp enter-3s,pp

The snake entered. After having entered ...

8) kaabu da meko as-ke rikle nak thi-sho al-kaa
one day el that their-of small new born-adj child-one

'baak-maakt-ne /// nak thi-sho al-kaa 'baak-maakta / ...
stay-3s,pp-ri new born-adj child-one stay-3s,pp

One day a baby was born to them. A baby having been born ...

In Example 8 above, -ne is a discourse-oriented speech marker. It indicates that the storyteller is not responsible for the truth of the content, because he is not an eye witness of the events reported. Phonologically -ne behaves as a suffix of the verb fused into the sentence-final intonation.

B. Chaining with Temporal Reference

In this form of paragraph boundary, some type of temporal relation is stated between the paragraph-initial chaining clause and the material that follows. The intonational signals for the paragraph boundary are essentially the same as described in Section A. The paragraph-final clause will end with a falling intonation followed by pause. The paragraph-initial clause which follows will manifest a sentence-non-final intonation. Emphasized elements will follow the paragraph-final clause and are preceded by sentence-final intonation. The emphasized element carries level intonation.

9) baat 'pam-se 'baakt /// baat 'pa-sh liik-sha nga mina / ...
talk do-3d pp talk do-sm finish-sm and then

The two talked. Having talked, then ...

10) rawa tohdro-mi oo-maakt /// rawa tohdro-mi oo-sh
tree hole-L enter-3s,pp tree hole-L enter-sm

liik-sha nga mina / ...
finish-sm and then

He entered a hollow tree. Having entered a hollow tree, then ...

11) 'noole phas 'upt-a 'baakt-ne gar-kaa-mi /// phas
after flour store-3s pp-ri jug-one-L flour

'up-sh liik-sha nga mina / ...
store-sm finish-sm and then

Afterwards he stored flour in a jug. Having stored flour, then ...

Two types of temporal reference are possible. The chained clause may occur previous to and in sequence with what follows it, or the chained clause may overlap in time with the action or state referred to in the following material.

1. Sequence of Events

Sequence in chaining is signalled by the affix -sha or by -sh liik-sha on the verb stem of the paragraph-initial chaining clause. The verb liik-tsa means 'to finish' and the affix -sha marks accomplished action. That the action has been accomplished is further emphasized by the sequence -sh liik-sha following the verb stem.

Examples with -sha only:

12) kyarsh 'gyap-nu /// minu kyarsh 'gyap-sha nga mina / ...
goat buy-1s,np and goat buy-sm and then

I will buy a goat. And having bought a goat, then ...

13) 'say ngoynti 'bwaaki-mi 'marko siware-mi 'tsayb 'pa-sho
once before jungle-L int jackal-ag young ones do-st

'baak-maakt /// siware-m 'tsayb 'pa-sha nga mina ...
stay-3s,pp jackal-ag young ones do-sm and then

Once upon a time there was a jackal in a jungle giving birth to small jackals. Having given birth to little ones, the jackal ...

Examples with -sh liik-sha:

14) baat 'pam-se 'baakt //// baat 'pa-sh liik-sha nga mina / ...
talk do-3d pp talk do-sm finish-sm and then

The two talked. Having talked, then ...

15) kutsum 'sad-a 'baakt /// kutsum 'saysh-sh liik-sha
dog kill-3s pp dog kill-sm finish-sm

nga mina / ...
and then

He killed the dog. Having killed the dog, then ...

Note that -sha or -sh liik-sha replaces any person markers

which may have occurred in the paragraph-final chaining clause. Thus in the paragraph-final clause of Example 14 we find baat 'pam-se 'baakt 'talk do-3d pp,' whereas in the following paragraph-initial clause, the person marker -se is replaced by the sequence marker -sh liik-sha. This fact reinforces our view that events are in focus in this type of paragraph boundary, not participants.

The variations allowed under chaining of this kind are essentially the same as those allowed in non-temporal chaining. Note in Example 16 how the order of elements is changed because of emphasis. In the paragraph-initial clause, the emphasized element is omitted.

16) 'noole phas 'upt-a 'baakt-ne gar-kaa-mi /// phas
after flour store-3s pp-ri jug-one-L flour

'up-sh liik-sha nga mina / ...
store-sm finish-sm and then

Afterwards he stored flour in a jug. Having stored flour, ...

The omission of the time element from the paragraph-initial clause is illustrated in Example 17:

17) kaabu 'naakdo-da baat 'pam-se 'baakt ///
one night-el talk do-3d pp

baat 'pa-sh liik-sha nga mina / ...
talk do-sm finish-sm and then

One night the two of them talked. Having talked, ...

In Example 18, the subject of the paragraph-final clause, expressed as a noun phrase, fails to reoccur in the paragraph-initial clause:

18) meko dzoy anteen-se 'baakt /// anteen-sh
that leopard scare-3s, re pp scare-sm

liik-sha nga mina / ...
finish-sm and then

That leopard was scared. Having been scared, ...

2. Simultaneous Events

Temporal overlap in chaining is signalled by the affix -nu on the verb stem of the paragraph-initial chaining clause. The affix -nu may be glossed 'while', 'during', or 'as'.

19) bus-kaa dzaak-maakt /// bus-kaa dzaak-me-nu-da / ...
snake-one-arrive-3s,pp snake-one-arrive-3s-sim-el

A snake arrived. As the snake was arriving ...

20) bre-th dzaak-ma 'baakt /// bre-th dzaak-ma-nu / ...
call-pu arrive-3pl pp call-pu arrive-3pl-sim

They arrived to call (for him). As they were arriving to call

Note that -nu does not replace person markers in the way that the sequence marker -sha or -sh liik-sha does.

Considerable variation under chaining is allowed. Example 21 shows that additions in the paragraph-initial chaining clause are possible (in this instance, the temporal element minu-da).

21) mal-th gaak-maakt /// minu-da mal-th gaak-me-nu-da / ...
seek-pu go-3s, pp and-el seek-pu go-ls-sim-el

He went to search. And while he was searching ...

Omission of elements is another, very common, kind of variation. It is taken for granted that the paragraph-initial chaining clause is understood even if a pronoun replaces the whole noun phrase of the paragraph-final clause. Temporal and connective elements may also be optionally omitted in the paragraph-initial clause.

22) 'diisa eko hahti 'da-sha nga mina /
the next morning this elephant tired-sm and then

kuy-b /// eko 'da-sha ku-me-nu / ...
come-up-3s,np this tired-sm come up-3s-sim

The next morning, being tired, the elephant will come uphill. As he was coming uphill tired ...

Both additions and omissions may occur. In Example 23 only the verb stem is identical in both the paragraph-final and the paragraph-initial chaining clauses, and new information is given.

23) pheri lesh-sha gurur pa pi-maakt /// pi-me / pi-me /
again return-sm run do come-3s,pp come-3s come-3s

pi-me / koo-n koo-n / pi-me-nu / ...
come-3s look-c look-c come-3s-sim

Turning back again he came quickly. While he was coming he was constantly looking.

II. CAST SPOTLIGHTING AS PARAGRAPH BOUNDARY

Participant-focused discourse makes use of participant spotlighting to mark paragraph boundaries. Paragraph boundaries marked in this way generally involve some mention of stage setting, such as time and place, as well as shift of the spotlight to a different participant. The sentence-final falling intonation and pause which mark the end of a paragraph are the same for participant-focused discourse as they are for event-focused discourse. The absence of chaining in participant-focused discourse and the central importance of cast serve to distinguish the two major types.

24) 'noole a dagyu-kali biha 'paa-me 'baakt ///
after his elder brother-ben wedding do-3pl pp

minu meko a pahy laata biha 'pa-tsa
and that his younger brother mute wedding do-auxR

ma-dum-ba / ...
neg-become-3s,np

After that, they arranged a marriage for the elder brother. A marriage arrangement for the younger brother was impossible, because he was a mute.

25) dok rap 'paysh-sha nga mina / wod-a 'baakt /// minu
up stand cause-sm and then put-3s pp and

'noole arko muru-mi 'pi-sha / ...
after other man-ag come-sm

He made the (cadaver of his ox) stand upright (in a barley field). Then a man came along ...

Several kinds of spotlighting boundaries have been observed. Examples 26 and 27 both taken from the same text, show that the spotlight may fall on a new participant or it may revert to a participant already introduced. In 26, meko a dagyu 'his elder brother' is mentioned for the first time in the story, and in 27 he is referred to again.

26) ma-dzoo-b taw thi-maakt /// minu-da meko a
neg-clever-adj son born-3s,pp and-el that his

dagyu tsihiin / ...
elder brother however

She gave birth to a stupid son. And his elder brother, however, ...

27) ... khiin dzaak-maakt /// minu meko a dagyu-m
house arrive-3s,pp and that his elder brother-ag

'tup-sha nga mina / ...
beat-sm and then

... he arrived at his house. After having beaten him, his elder brother ...

The introduction of a new participant requires a noun phrase to describe him. A participant already introduced may be referred to by a pronoun, but a pronominal reference often signals that the spotlight is shifting from the pronominal referent to some other member of the cast. The following example is taken from the beginning of a story in which a business man and his dog play the leading roles. Sentence one and two introduce the business man. In sentence three he is referred to by a pronoun and the dog is already coming into the spotlight. In sentence four, the man is in the background and the dog is in focus.

28) 1. 'say bessa kyet 'paysh-sho mur-kaa 'baak-maakt //
once much money make-adj man-one stay-3s,pp

2. minu nga mina meko mur nikay pasal 'daysh-sha nga
and and then that man many shop keep-sm and

mina / meko mur-ke kyet 'shush 'baak-maakt // 3. minu
then that man-of money much stay-3s,pp and

meko-mi kutsum-kaa thul-sho 'baak-maakt // 4. meko kutsum
that-ag dog-one feed-st be-3s,pp that dog

thul-a / thul-a / thul-a / meko loo 'nell rup-b
feed-3s feed-3s feed-3s that talk all understand-N

dum-maakt meko kutsuma-mi //
become-3s,pp that dog-ag

1. Once there lived a rich man. 2. This man made a lot of money by keeping many shops. 3. He had been feeding a dog. 4. After having been fed for a long period of time, the dog came to understand human language.

The initial clause of a paragraph gives some information about time or place. In Example 29, meko deesa-mi 'in that country' gives information about where the following part of the story will take place. At the same time the new participant is introduced in a very impressive way: a big, important, and rich man.

29) ... theeb dees-kaa dzaak-dim-maakt /// meko deesa-mi
big country-one arrive-Lr-3s,pp that country-L

theeb allakhe tahni mur-kaa 'baak-maakt //
big important rich man-one stay-3s,pp

... he arrived in a big country. In this country lived a great, important, and rich man.

Not every shift of subject, however, marks the beginning of a paragraph (see Example 28). Paragraph-medial shifts differ from spotlighting in their intonation pattern. Paragraph-medial clauses which introduce a new subject are preceded by a short fall and a short pause, whereas paragraph boundaries are marked by long falling contour and long pause. In paragraph-medial position, stage setting before a new subject has not been observed.

Example 30 is the final paragraph of a story about two brothers which further illustrates shift of subject. The younger one, handicapped by deformity of his body, got cheated by his elder brother. Through cleverness the younger finally got rich and the elder, by stupidity, got very poor. The first sentence of the closing paragraph describes the situation of the elder brother. Sentences two and three tell about the wealth of the younger brother. Sentence four shifts back again to the elder brother.

30) 1. minu 'noole a dagyu tham prung dum-maakta //
and after his elder brother very poor become-3s,pp

2. meko a pahy laata 'thampa kyet thiy-b
that his younger brother mute very much money touch-adj

mur dum-sha nga mina / 'baak-maakt // 3. minu nga mina 'noole
man become-sm and then stay-3s,pp and and then after

tehrey 'shush tahni dum-maakt meko laata // 4. a
very very rich become-3s,pp that mute his

dagyu tsihiin puyn-sha 'dzay-b dum-maakt ///
elder brother however beg-sm eat-adj become-3s,pp

1. After this event the elder brother got very poor. 2. His younger brother the mute, having made so much money, stayed very rich. 3. Later on the mute became enormously rich. 4. His elder brother, however, became a beggar.

Conclusion

We have indicated that there are at least two distinctive types of paragraph boundary in Sunwar discourse. We have suggested that these two types of boundary are correlated with two discourse types: event focused and participant focused. The characteristics of the boundaries themselves support this suggestion quite naturally.

REFERENCES

Grimes, Joseph E. and Naomi Glock. 1970. A Saramaccan narrative pattern. Language 46.408-25.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The authors are indebted to Dr. Austin Hale for his critical reading of this paper and particularly for his helpful suggestions as to wording and style.

[2]For additional information on the Sunwar language, refer to Footnote 2 in Bieri-Schulze, An approach to discourse in Sunwar, which follows this paper.

[3]For examples of these two discourse types, see Texts 8-11 in Appendix B of Bieri-Schulze, An approach to discourse in Sunwar, following this paper.

[4]A key to abbreviations used in the examples is given in Appendix A of the following paper.